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EDITORIAL COMMENT AND NEWS NOTES

THIS ISSUE OF THE JOURNAL

Among the many inquiries directed each day to the Bureau of Elementary Education of the State Department of Education, the one that surpasses all others in frequency relates to methods of reporting pupil progress to parents. This issue of the *Journal* shows trends in reporting pupil progress in California and presents some promising practices.

The investigations reported give evidence of the fact that home and school are engaged in a joint enterprise in the education of children. Teachers are visiting in homes, conferring with parents at school, holding group conferences with the parents of children in individual classes. Parents are visiting schools for purposes of observation, participating in parent-education classes and expressing enthusiastic approval of individual teacher-parent conferences. Administrators are providing opportunities for teachers to improve their conference methods through workshops and extension courses and are directing attention to the use of cumulative records and sociometric and psychological tests as useful means of deepening teachers' understanding of children.

All of these activities reported in this issue show a growing awareness of the importance of a full partnership of teachers and parents in guiding the in-school and out-of-school growth and development of children.

TEACHING CHILDREN WHO MOVE WITH THE CROPS

A notable accomplishment in curriculum development marks the culmination of the Fresno County Project on the Educational Program for Migrant Children, a two-year project carried on in the schools in Fresno County under the general

supervision of Walter G. Martin, County Superintendent of Schools.

The project, subsidized by the Rosenberg Foundation, involved intensive work and co-operation by faculties in 19 school districts. Two research studies, one made by students from the University of California, Berkeley, and the other by students from the University of Southern California, contributed objective evidence on the attitudes of children in contrasting socioeconomic groups and on administrative problems in schools attended by migrant children.

Project results are presented in a 95-page publication illustrated by a hundred photographs taken by Herb Polson, office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. Copies of the publication may be secured from Walter G. Martin, County Superintendent of Schools, 2314 Mariposa Street, Fresno.

TWO STORIES BY CALIFORNIA AUTHOR

Fran Hubbard is the author of two books about the Sierra for children—*Animal Friends of the Sierra* and *A Day With Tupi*. *Animal Friends* is a 32-page booklet of stories about large and small animals of the Sierra, lavishly illustrated with marginal and full page pen and ink drawings by William D. Berry. *A Day With Tupi*, a story of an Indian boy, is illustrated with strong primitive pictures by Ed Vella. Both books are printed by the Awani Press. They may be obtained by addressing the author Frances Hubbard, P. O. Box 21, Yosemite Park, California. Paper bound books are \$1.00 each, clothbound \$2.25 plus tax.

DRAWINGS BY SONIA RIHA

The drawings illustrating the article "Parent-Teacher Conferences—An Experience in Human Relations" were made by Sonia Riha, a teacher in the Cowan Avenue School, Los Angeles.

REPORTING PUPIL PROGRESS IN CALIFORNIA CITIES

HELEN HEFFERNAN, *Chief, Bureau of Elementary Education*, and
MRS. LORENE E. MARSHALL, *Consultant in Elementary Education*,
California State Department of Education

In May, 1955, the Bureau of Elementary Education mailed to the 99 superintendents of California city school districts and of those with the status of city school districts a questionnaire entitled "Practices in Reporting Elementary School Pupil Progress." Completed questionnaires were returned by 91 superintendents. One of this number was received after the data from 90 of the returned questionnaires had been tabulated.

THE DATA COLLECTED

Tabulations of the responses to each section of the questionnaire follow, and in certain instances items of particular interest in the tabulations are pointed out.

Method of Reporting Used

The first question, "How is pupil progress reported to parents?" was answered as indicated in the following tabulation.

Report cards only.....	27
Report cards with parent conferences.....	54
Parent conferences only.....	1
Various patterns at different grade levels.....	8

Reports from eight school districts stated that various patterns were in use for different grades. These patterns seemed to indicate that the school systems were inaugurating parent conferences in the lower grades and moving gradually to their use in the upper grades. Three districts reported pattern 1, two districts reported pattern 2, and one district each reported patterns 3, 4 and 5 as shown in the tabulation on the next page.

1. Report card with parent conference, grades 1 to 3
Report card only, grades 4 to 6
2. Parent conference only, grades 1 to 6
Report card only, grades 7 and 8
3. Report card with parent conference, grades 1 to 6
Report card only, grades 7 and 8
4. Report card with parent conference, grades 1 and 2
Report card only, grades 3 to 6
5. Report card and parent conference, optional with each school
in grades 1 and 2
Report card only, grades 3 to 6

In four of the 27 districts in which the report card was designated as the method of apprising parents of pupil progress, the following notations were made on the questionnaire:

Conferences are held with parents periodically or as need arises—approximately two per family each year.

Certain schools use report card and parent conference in grades 1 and 2.

Parent conferences are being extended each year.

Conferences are used to report to parents as a supplementary procedure . . . each teacher tries to have at least one parent conference and as many more as possible during the year.

One district reported that the report card is used only in cases where a teacher-parent conference cannot be arranged.

Reasons Reported for Using Report Card

Although not all school districts reported their reasons for using the report card, responses clustered around three major items as follows:

Parents prefer report card.....	19
Teachers are satisfied with present report card.....	17
Report card is less time-consuming.....	14

Only four districts reported that the report card provided motivation for children's learning. Two districts reported that they continued use of the report card because "people are re-

luctant to change." Other reasons for the use of the report card were mentioned once each, as follows:

Parents whom the teachers most want to reach do not seem to be able to meet a conference schedule. This is frequently due to lack of transportation and the fact that many parents are working. Lack of funds prevents employing substitutes so that teachers may have the time for parent conferences.

Not all teachers are qualified to carry on parent conferences.

Tremendous increase in number of new teachers has made it impossible to give necessary in-service training for parent conferences.

We plan to go into a conference type of reporting to parents as soon as plans for the development of such a method are made and necessary training can be arranged for teachers.

It is interesting to note that many of the reasons given for using the report card do not indicate any inherent value in this method of reporting pupil progress but rather stem from difficulties school administrators anticipate in moving toward a method involving the teacher in face-to-face contact with parents.

Reasons Given for Using Both the Report Card and Teacher-Parent Conference

School districts reported more than one reason for the use of both report cards and the teacher-parent conferences.

To clarify the information on the report card was reported by 55 school districts as one reason for using teacher-parent conferences; of this number 33 districts designated this as the main reason for the conferences.

The second reason given by 48 districts was that parents are frequently unable or unwilling to participate in a person-to-person conference with the teacher of their child. Of the 48 districts reporting this reason, eight listed it as the main reason for using both methods.

The third reason given by 45 districts was the insistence of parents on some system of grading; of this number 14 listed this reason for the continued use of the report card.

A gradual change of method in reporting from the formal report card to the teacher-parent conference was given as the reason for the current use of the two methods in 31 school districts.

*Grades in Which Both the Report Card and
Teacher-Parent Conference Are Used*

The number of districts reporting the use of both the report card and the teacher-parent conference is shown by grade level as follows:

Kindergarten	42
Grades 1-3	67
Grades 4-6	57
Grades 7-8	27

Several school districts report using the report card twice during the year and alternating with two teacher-parent conferences.

Since this study was limited to elementary schools in city school districts and those classified as city districts, the number of pupils in grades seven and eight could not represent more than 47 per cent of seventh- and eighth-grade pupils in the public schools of the state because approximately 53 per cent of such pupils are enrolled in junior high schools.

*Frequency of Use of the Teacher-Parent
Conference with Report Card*

In districts using both the report card and teacher-parent conference, the school districts reported the frequency of conferences as follows:

Once a year	18
Twice a year	46
Three or four a year	8

Many districts reported holding frequent teacher-parent conferences when the teacher, school administrator, or other staff

member believed the interests of the child could best be served by closer co-operation between home and school.

Grades in Which Only Teacher-Parent Conferences Are Used

In 24 school districts no report card is provided for kindergarten children, but extensive use is made of teacher-parent conferences. In two districts, conferences were used as the only method of reporting pupil progress to parents of children in kindergarten and grades one to six. In one large city school system that used only conferences for reporting, provision is made for "conferences with parents at least twice a year in all grades, kindergarten through six." In this system the conference method of reporting pupil progress has been in use for the past eight years, and plans are being made to extend its use into the junior high schools. In a survey made in this district during 1952-1953 and reported on June 1, 1953, 92 per cent of mothers and fathers of elementary school children expressed approval of continuing the conference method of reporting.

Provision for Scheduling Teacher-Parent Conferences.

One of the persistent difficulties reported by the school districts was the problem of scheduling teacher-parent conferences. The following plans were reported:

After school hours or at night	55
After a minimum day	32
Teacher relieved by substitute	11
Teacher relieved by other teachers in the building	7
Schools closed	2

Certain districts reported more than one method for scheduling conferences. In certain districts substitutes were provided for kindergarten teachers; in other districts primary teachers held conferences after school hours and upper grades were on a minimum school day when conferences were held.

Provision for In-service Education on Teacher-Parent Conferences

School districts recognized their responsibility in providing assistance to teachers in improving their conference techniques. In 83 districts teachers were supplied with an outline to follow, and in 64 of the 83 districts workshops, institutes, and extension courses were provided for in-service education.

Attitudes of Parents and Teachers Toward Reporting Practices

The reports from school districts were in substantial agreement that although parents attend and approve of teacher-parent conferences they also wish to have written reports.

A high degree of agreement was apparent in the reported attitudes of teachers. In general, teachers are enthusiastic about the values of conferences with parents and although the conferences consume a great amount of time, teachers are of the opinion that the extra time returns worthwhile dividends in helping them to understand children and in improved home-school relations.

The following statements represent a sampling of parents' and teachers' attitudes in each of the seven school districts selected as typical.

Parents are accepting the conference as superior to the report card. This is indicated by the fact that about 80 per cent are participating in conferences and almost none of them request the report cards, which are only given upon request.

After teachers become familiar with the conference techniques, we find they much prefer it to the report card.

Parents want both report cards and conferences.

Teachers who have tried the organized conference plan like it. Lack of time, difficulty of contacting all parents, and inexperience of teachers are limiting factors. Since parents request written reports in addition to conferences, teachers feel that they can attend to only one or the other without sacrificing time required by their teaching responsibilities.

Most parents want and expect a rather explicit type of report card that they can readily understand. Many will accept this as final; others want a teacher-parent conference to amplify the report card and to put the child's grading on a more personal basis.

Teachers, too, like a rather explicit type of reporting form, but they also welcome the opportunity to confer with parents.

Parents seem to be satisfied with the report card and conference method; approximately 94 per cent of parents participate each time.

Teachers agree that conferences are time-consuming but believe they are the best method of reporting to parents.

Parents have indicated a definite liking for a report card; conference procedures, however, have become more common.

Teachers find some difficulty in getting sufficient time for conferences. However, those who have expended the greatest amount of effort on the conferences seem to be most enthusiastic about their success.

A recent survey of our parents indicated overwhelming acceptance of teacher parent conferences. A desire to have a report card, also, was expressed by about one-half of them.

Our teachers were polled this year and only 21 out of 231 in grades one to six wanted report cards; 59 wanted a combination of report card and conference, but over half of these wanted the conference if it were a choice between the two methods.

Many parents have expressed a desire for us to have conference type of reporting, at least as supplementary to a report card.

Many teachers do supplement the report card with a conference for some of the children in their classes. The teachers in our district would like to see us make use of teacher-parent conferences as a means of reporting pupil progress.

Surveys of Parent and Teacher Opinion

A number of school districts have employed some type of inquiry form to determine the opinion of parents and teachers relative to reporting methods. Three of these have been selected as typical.

In a district enrolling 1661 pupils, conferences were held with parents of 1612 pupils or 97 per cent of all pupils. The conference method of reporting meets with the wholehearted endorsement of practically all the teachers. The stated advantages ranged from "a greater understanding of the child" to "enlisting the co-operation of the home." In a survey of parent opinion, 94 per cent of the parents expressed themselves as strongly favoring the parent conference.

In a southern California unified school district, parents were asked the following questions. The responses of parents to the questions asked are interesting and revealing.

Do you want to continue teacher-parent conferences?

Yes: 576 No: 23

How often should conferences be held?

First and third quarters as at present: 472

More often: 68 Less often: 27

Do you feel you are learning what you would like to know from conferences?

Yes: 562 No: 9

In the same survey, all but one teacher favored continuing conferences twice a year and said they believe they are getting greater insight into the needs of the children they teach through this contact with parents.

A school district located in the San Joaquin Valley sampled parent opinion on methods of reporting. The questions asked and the responses received to the questions follow:

Are you in favor of continuing conferences?

Yes: 237 No: 12

Are you learning what you need to know from conferences?

Yes: 213 No: 10

Do you want conferences and a report card?

Yes: 223 No: 5

A northern California county sampled parent and teacher opinion on the subject. Questionnaires were completed by 726 parents and 151 teachers and administrators. More than 85

per cent of the parents and more than 70 per cent of the teachers said that they favored continuation of teacher-parent conferences as part of the reporting. One-third of the teachers stated that they could use assistance in developing and improving their conferences with parents.

Sample of Report Card

Many of the school districts submitted the report card form used. Lack of space prevents reproduction of more than one form. The card shown here was selected because of its simplicity, its coverage of the statutory school subjects, its provision for reporting personality development, and its grading system, which takes into account individual variations in ability.

On one side of the card provision is made for the identification of the child, name of the school, parents' signatures, parent comment and teacher comment, and a message from the school superintendent.

REPORT CARD FORM

WHAT THE LETTERS MEAN

O—Outstanding for your child; commendation for special effort and achievement.

S—Satisfactory for your child; achievement consistent with ability.

N—Not satisfactory for your child; improvement needed.

NOTE: Any further information in regard to the standing of your child may be secured in personal conference.

<i>Growth in Skills</i>		1st report	2nd report	3rd report
READING				
Understands what he reads.....				
Works to develop independent reading habits.....				
WRITING				
Expresses himself well.....				
Uses basic writing skills.....				
Writes legibly.....				
Spells correctly.....				
Uses good sentence structure.....				
Learns to use new words.....				
ARITHMETIC				
Knows arithmetic facts.....				
Understands arithmetic processes (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division).....				
Applies skill in solving problems.....				
SOCIAL STUDIES				
(History, Geography, Civics, Government, Development of American Ideals)				
Works to develop a knowledge and understanding of home, community, state, country, world.....				
Works to develop skill in the use of materials (newspapers, maps, encyclopedias, etc.).....				

SCIENCE			
Works to develop keen observation.....			
Is growing in scientific knowledge.....			
LISTENING			
Understands what he hears and responds wisely.....			
HEALTH			
Works to develop good health habits.....			
Helps to maintain safety.....			
Plays and enjoys games.....			
Works to develop skill in physical education.....			
MUSIC			
Takes part in group singing.....			
Responds to rhythm.....			
Works to develop basic music skills.....			
ART			
Expresses ideas creatively.....			
Works to develop a variety of skills.....			
Personal Development			
Is developing a variety of interests.....			
Is courteous and considerate.....			
Respects the rights and property of others.....			
Shares outside experience, skills, and materials with others.....			
Accepts responsibility.....			
Works to the best of his ability.....			

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data in this study reveal the use of a report card for reporting pupil progress to parents in approximately 90 per cent of the city districts and of those classified as city districts.

The data also indicate the wide use of teacher-parent conferences to supplement the information on the report card.

In schools where only a report card is used to report to parents there is recognition of the fact that in certain instances conferences between parents and teachers must be held to solve acute problems.

Wide variation in scheduling time for teacher-parent conferences, not only among districts but also within the same district, was reported. The usual times for such conferences were listed as after school hours and at night. It appears that administrative attention to the problems of scheduling is needed so that teachers may have adequate time for conferences and that the conferences can fully benefit child, parent, and teacher.

Teachers are generally enthusiastic in their attitudes concerning the value of conferences with parents but indicate some feelings of inadequacy about their ability to handle face-to-face contacts with parents. Certain administrators are reluctant to have inexperienced teachers hold conferences with parents.

Although many districts reported that assistance is given teachers in methods of holding conferences with parents, the need for a continuous program of in-service education is apparent if teachers who are new to the profession or who are inexperienced in the conference method are to fulfill this important function with confidence, skill, and satisfaction. Much thought and effort should be given to meeting this administrative and supervisory responsibility.

Reporting pupil progress to parents is an accepted part of the school's function. A teacher must give a great deal of time, energy, and thoughtful consideration to such reporting. As indicated frequently by the districts responding in this study, teachers do much of the work required in reporting after school hours. Thus, the use of both a report card and a conference as the regular procedure for informing parents of their children's progress represents an investment of a considerable portion of the teacher's time.

Can teachers do both? Should they be expected to do both? Comments in the questionnaire concerning parents' attitudes and the reports of surveys of parent groups indicate that parents overwhelmingly favor conferences, but many want a report card also. Each district should face the issue concerning the best use of the teacher's time. If a dual system of reporting means using time which the teacher should devote to the preparation necessary for guiding the learning of children, then serious consideration should be directed toward simplifying the written report and reducing the number of times it is issued.

The major responsibility of teachers is the guidance of children. The regular use of two methods of reporting seriously encroaches upon the time and energy of teachers which should be devoted to the major task of teaching.

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES—AN EXPERIENCE IN HUMAN RELATIONS

BERNARD LONSDALE, *Consultant in Elementary Education,
California State Department of Education*

Mrs. Jones prepared for the conference with John's teacher with mixed feelings. She was eager to talk to her boy's teacher. She wanted to hear what Mrs. Brown would say about John. For some unanswerable reason she was nervous about it all. As she moved about the house, her thoughts ran here and there, but always back to John and his teacher and the conference. Maybe John wasn't getting along in school. Well, after all he probably was the youngest one in his class. Surely his teacher knew that. Maybe he wasn't getting along with the other children. Well, before he started to school there weren't any children his age in the neighborhood with whom he could play. His teacher ought to give him time to get used to playing with other children. This was only the end of October. To be exact, he had only been in school seven weeks.

Perhaps, Mrs. Jones thought, she should have made more effort to visit school. It really had taken effort to stay away. She hadn't gone to the meeting that was planned for all the parents in John's room. It was her birthday and John's father had planned a surprise. They had all gone out to dinner. Mrs. Jones wondered if John's teacher would remind her of her absence from that meeting. Linda's mother had gone and she had told her everything the teacher had said.

It doesn't seem possible, Mrs. Jones thought, that John is in the first grade. She had hated to have that first day of school come. It hadn't been bad last year when he went to kindergarten. He was only gone a few hours each day and if they wanted to take a trip with John's father, it seemed all right to keep him out. First grade was different. He left in the morning

and took his lunch with him. Whenever his father returned from a trip, and it seemed that he was gone most of the time lately, the first question he directed to John was, "How is school?" Each time John replied with considerable enthusiasm, "Just fine!" Any further questioning as to what made it fine was to no avail.

Mrs. Jones suddenly realized that if she didn't hurry she would be late. She was sure the appointment was for two o'clock. Maybe she better make certain. She searched frantically in all the drawers of the desk for the note that had come from school. When she finally found it only the top half was there. Then she remembered that the part with the date and time was the part she had signed and sent back to school with John. She had meant to make a note of the date and time on her calendar. She stopped to read the top part again.

West Acres School—October 3, 1955

Dear Mrs. Jones:

Many parents and teachers have felt that our present report card is not fully adequate or satisfactory for reporting the child's progress in school and have expressed the desire to supplement the card with teacher-parent conferences.

Instead of sending the report card home this quarter, we are scheduling a conference for every child's parents with his teacher during the week of October 24-28. We will run a minimum day schedule for pupils each day dismissing grades 1 to 3 at 1:40 p.m., and grades 4 to 8 at 2:20 p.m. This will give the teacher time to talk with each parent for fifteen or twenty minutes.

We hope that in this conference we can give you a better understanding of your child's progress and needs than we have been able to do with the written report. This is our first attempt to see and talk with all parents in such a short period of time. We will need your co-operation to make it a success. Will you please fill in the form below and return it to your child's teacher. I am looking forward to this opportunity to work together more closely with you in the interest of your child.

Sincerely yours,
Jane Brown

*The teacher is
friendly*



A friendly smile greeted Mrs. Jones when she opened the door of John's classroom.

"Come in! You're Mrs. Jones, John's mother, aren't you? I'm glad to see you."

"Thank you! I hope I'm not late."

"That's all right. We've made arrangements for a teacher to take care of the children while their parents are having conferences."

"I told John to wait until I was through before he left for home."

"Fine, then you won't need to worry about him. How about a cup of tea while we talk?"

"Do we have time?"

"Oh, yes! I have heated some water and we can sit over here. I have some things on the library table I want to show you."

John's teacher pulled a chair around so that she and Mrs. Jones could sit comfortably facing each other.

As John's teacher busied herself with the tea things, she said with enthusiasm, "I enjoy John so much!"

*The teacher lets
Mrs. Jones talk*



*John's teacher
listened*

*The teacher made
John's mother feel
comfortable*



"Well, John is a strange little fellow. You know he is our only child. His father is gone a great deal and I suppose I baby him. We are alone so much. I suppose I spoil John, but you know he was a pretty sick little boy for almost a whole year. I feel that I have to make up for his father being away."

"I can understand how you feel."

"I get terribly irritated with the situation at home. I wish John's father would change his work. We really haven't any home life."

"It must be hard for John to have his Daddy away so much, but I imagine he's glad to see him when he comes home."

"Oh yes, but I'm so afraid that something might happen to John. I guess all mothers are protective. But, I just can't let him out of my sight. Now with his father away so much it seems as if he depends on me for everything. That's what I mean when I say I have spoiled him. Now John's father is becoming critical of me and he keeps saying 'Why can't John do anything for himself?' He criticizes John, but I suppose he really is criticizing me."

Mrs. Jones expressed her feelings freely



Mrs. Jones continued for a few more minutes expressing her feelings about her insecurity with John's father and her absorbing concern for John. John's teacher listened and listened some more. The crucial items which seemed to be bothering John's mother appeared to be reduced through talking. John's teacher was sympathetic. She didn't move in to say "You should do this—," or "It would be better to do this—," she continued in her role as a teacher who was having a conference with a parent for the purpose of reporting a child's progress in school. Sometimes teachers have raised havoc with home-school relationships and defeated the purposes of parent-teacher conferences by changing roles and attempting to do the work of a psychiatrist.

John's teacher felt that rapport had been established and without cutting John's mother off she moved into the purpose of the conference.

"John has such an unusual vocabulary."

"Yes, he is a great talker. He likes to tell stories and I am surprised at the big words he uses."

"The children enjoy listening to his stories. He likes to paint and tell stories about his paintings. I have some of his easel paintings here. Isn't this a nice use of color? Here is one he drew for Halloween. I wrote the story he told about it on the back. 'These are ghosts having a procession down a lonely road'."

John's teacher starts conference by selecting one of John's strengths

*Attention is focused
on John*



"I never know what to say when John shows me his paintings. I can't figure out what most of them are about."

"I think it is enough if you just tell him you like them. If he wants to tell you what they are about he will. So many times six-year-olds are just having fun with paint and color. What they paint means something to them and they expect us to know what they mean. Children are apt to be disappointed if we say 'What is it about?' Perhaps just saying 'You are a good painter, John,' will encourage him to tell you more about his paintings."

"That should please him."

"In the classroom John is inclined to sit back and wait. He seems to be afraid to tackle things. He needs to be encouraged to do things on his own."

"Doesn't he seem more immature than the other children?"

"John isn't immature for John. He may seem less mature than some of the other children, but you see each child grows at a rate that is peculiar to himself. I don't like to compare one child with another because then we begin to create expectancies for some children that are unrealistic."

*John's teacher
refrains from com-
paring John with
other children*



*John's teacher helps
Mrs. Jones know
what to say when
John does a painting*

"It seems to me I'm always comparing John to some of the other children in the neighborhood."

"What we want to do is build on the things John can do. Look at this truck John is making. It took him a long time to get started, but it is coming along and he is very proud of it. Does John have any tools at home?"

"There are all of his father's tools, but I'd be afraid to let him use them unless his father were home."

"It would be fine if you would get him some tools of his own. His father could get him some soft lumber. John handles tools very well. You needn't be afraid of his getting hurt."

"There is a workbench in the garage, but I've tried to keep him away from those things because I don't want his father to scold him when he gets home in case anything went wrong."

"You would be around if he needed any help, but he won't have too much difficulty."

"Did the children make all those things?"

"Yes, except for that house and one or two trucks that I saved from last year."

"John has been talking about all the building that has been going on in his room and I couldn't figure out what it was for."

"You see, in our social studies, we are studying the community that is close to us. You've seen children playing at home having a store, a post office, or running a gas station."

"John is always playing he is an animal, or a cowboy, or something."

"Well in school we use play as a natural way for children to learn. Learnings in the social studies are extended through play activities."

John's teacher found a ready and interested listener in John's mother as she briefly described the program that the school planned for six-and-seven-year-olds.

John's teacher suggests how to work to correct a weakness

John's teacher suggests ways to help John experience more success

John's teacher interprets the education program

*John's teacher shows
an interest in
John's success*

"I have a description here of the school program. It outlines the experiences John will have in school. There are also some suggestions of ways in which parents can help their children to be more successful. You might be interested in keeping a record of some of the things that John does with success and that seem to make him more willing to try things on his own. I believe in that old saying that 'Nothing succeeds like success'."

"I'm glad to take these suggestions. I see some things here that I never thought of doing."

"Well, this will give us both something to look for between now and the time we have another conference."

*John's mother and
teacher plan to
work together*

"It was nice of you to come. I hope you will be able to visit another time when the children are here. We needn't wait for another scheduled conference to talk about John's progress. Anytime you are free we could arrange for at least a short conference. You know we want John to succeed in school and I'm sure you want John to be happy."

Mrs. Jones felt a kind of a glow inside as John ran to her from the playground. She hummed to herself as they started toward home. At the end of the block, John's mother said, "Let's go around past the market. I want to pick up a few things."

The few things were of little consequence. The important thing was the empty wooden apple box John's mother took from the grocery. It was like the boxes the children used to construct things at school.

"Here, John, you can carry this box."

"Oh, Gee! What's it for? Can I have it?"

"You certainly can. I thought maybe you'd like to use some of your Dad's tools to make something out of it."

"Gee, Mom, I could make a space ship."

Back at her desk, John's teacher filled in a form which had John's name at the top, the date of the conference with John's mother, a space in which to write down the particular strengths and remediable weaknesses about which they had talked, and some of the things they had planned to do together to help John be more successful. John's teacher dropped the form into the cumulative record folder which had been set up with John's name on it. As John's teacher put the form into the folder she thought, "All this information in the folder is about John, and what we know about him keeps growing in volume. It will be interesting to see what kind of a person John grows into."

John's teacher had a feeling that the conference with John's mother had been a good conference. She reviewed it in her mind. Why did she feel that it was a good conference?

1. She had been friendly
2. She had made Mrs. Jones feel comfortable
3. She let Mrs. Jones get some worries off her mind
4. She listened to Mrs. Jones
5. She made no attempt to tell Mrs. Jones how to manage her family life
6. She focused attention on John
7. She emphasized a particular strength of John's on which they could build
8. She described a remediable weakness of John's on which they could work
9. She suggested ways by which she and John's mother could work together to help John
10. She sent Mrs. Jones away feeling that she was "in" not "out".

Conferences had not always been so easy for Mrs. Brown. She recalled how panicky she had felt three years ago when parent-teacher conferences as a method of reporting pupil progress had been initiated in the school. The year before that, a few of the teachers had started on a voluntary basis to hold regularly scheduled conferences with the parents of the chil-

dren in their rooms. They expressed enthusiasm over the conferences and the administrator planned faculty meetings at which the teachers who were holding conferences described their practices and indicated their problems. Mrs. Brown was hesitant about starting. She could only think of the problems that would have to be resolved. Early in the spring one of the teachers suggested at a meeting that parent-teacher conferences as a method of reporting pupil progress become established as a policy in the district. There was considerable discussion. Finally two or three teachers expressed their real attitudes which amounted to feelings of insecurity because of lack of training and experience in using conference techniques. The group decided that for the rest of the year a series of meetings would be held for the in-service education of the teachers in conference techniques. She had developed a great deal of security in the last three years. Much satisfaction had come to her as she learned to work closely with parents for the success and happiness of their children.

THE NEED FOR HOME-SCHOOL CO-OPERATION

Parent-teacher conferences as a method of reporting pupil progress were well established as a practice in the elementary schools of California when they were initiated in the school where Mrs. Brown taught. Educators have been concerned for a long time about reporting pupil progress in ways that will contribute to the child's wholesome development and increase the parents' understanding of the educational program. How to interpret and report a child's normal development, his outstanding successes, as well as his educational aches and pains has been a problem of major concern to educators. Many parents have difficulty in understanding an educational program which has moved ahead a generation since they went to school. Many procedures with which they were familiar are out of date; new methods have taken their place. Throughout the elementary school they see their children moving about freely in the classroom and often talking to one another. In the school of the parents' childhood such behavior was generally disapproved.

School for them meant reading, geography, and arithmetic. For children today school means more than these intellectual pursuits alone. It means opportunity for the fullest physical, social, and emotional development as well. It involves experiences in physical education, art, music, social studies, literature, and rhythms.

It is not always easy for parents to understand a program that has changed so markedly since their school days. Even though the different experiences of another generation and lack of special training make it difficult to understand modern educational methods, nevertheless affection and concern for their children and the desire to have them grow into happy, successful people make parents eager to know what schools are doing and why they are doing it.

Child success has always been a pressing parental problem. One has only to consider the rewards given to children for good report cards and the punishments for poor ones, the special dancing and music lessons provided, to realize that parents are vitally concerned about the success of their children. Teachers, too, are concerned about child success, and they realize the role of the parents in helping the child to attain it. They know that no matter how well planned the educational program is, it is not effective unless the child is well fed. They know that children who are tense or nervous or need sleep do not learn satisfactorily. They know the importance of security and affection in the child's life. The service of the teacher, then, is incomplete unless sound home-school relationships are established.

SOME BLOCKS TO PARENT-TEACHER CO-OPERATION

Although parents and teachers have the same goal, child success, there frequently are blocks which keep them from communicating with each other. Some of the blocks to parent-teacher co-operation are explained in the following seven points.

1. *Parents are subjective and emotional in their attitudes toward children; teachers are more objective and matter of fact. Par-*

ents love their children regardless of shortcomings or their failure to measure up to other children of their age. Parents often feel that the shortcomings of their children are actually their own. If Bobby does not learn readily, his mother may feel it is her slowness in her child. A parent often interprets criticism of her child as criticism of her character, her methods of management, or of the family background. There are always characteristics which endear a child to his family but which are not readily discernible in large groups. The parent sees the child as an individual, has watched him grow, and thus understands him, while the teacher sees him only as a member of a group and has not been associated with him through the various stages of his development. A teacher may say without a qualm, "Bobby is a poor worker" or "Mary has such short attention." These statements may represent only a fact to a teacher, but they may spell tragedy to a parent.

2. *Many parents have ready-made attitudes toward teachers.* As a result of their childhood experiences, the word teacher is charged with meaning. It often represents misused authority and superior knowledge so that old resentments become a part of the present parent-teacher relationship.
3. *Parents are fearful of change.* The ways that they know represent firm ground and security. New methods, new educational ideas which take the child in directions in which his parents have not ventured are looked upon as dangerous experimentalism. Even though parents are eager for their children's success, many are reluctant to accept new ways and to discard the old and see their children grow away from them.
4. *Parents are unsure of their own values.* Public schools are maintained to induct the young into a democratic society. Many parents are unaware of the values held by society and toward which the school is working; they are unaware of the role which the school plays in developing these values in children. Parents often do not relate the sharing of blocks in the first grade, taking turns on the playground, choosing a task and carrying it through, with the development of an effective democratic personality. Because of their educational backgrounds they often fail to see that the modern school has

broadened its objectives, that inducting the young into a democratic society is not done simply by the teaching of reading and arithmetic, but is a much more complex process.

5. *Most parents have less scientific knowledge of growth and development or of the ways children learn than teachers.* Although both parents and teachers have similar goals in terms of desirable attitudes and skills, their ways of attaining them are different. Both parents and teachers wish children to be co-operative, to take care of their equipment, to be considerate of others, and to be competent in meeting the demands of their environment. Teachers realize that not all children learn these things at the same time, and that different children may need different treatment to attain similar ends. Variations in expectancies for different children may need different treatment to attain similar ends. Variations in expectancies for different children may be interpreted by some parents as inadequate teaching procedure. Lack of scientific knowledge on the part of many parents makes it difficult for them to understand an educational program that is based on the principle of individual differences.
6. *Teachers are sometimes fearful of parents.* Many teachers operate from a limited background of experience in family life. They sometimes feel incompetent to cope with the complex problems with which the parents of their children are struggling: poverty, large families and inadequate housing, running a family and holding a job at the same time, and marital problems. Sometimes parents have a financial and social security which many teachers do not enjoy. Teachers are fearful lest they displease these parents, and the parent-teacher relationship becomes strained and artificial.
7. *Some teachers are unsure of their educational philosophy.* Teachers sometimes become so engrossed in the everyday demands of the classroom that they become more and more removed from the life stream or the culture into which the young are being inducted. The daily program, keeping the clay moist and the paint brushes clean, mounting pictures, takes so much energy and time that teachers sometimes forget the larger issues and the long-term goals. They are unable to help parents understand the broader purposes of education because they are out of touch with the larger aspects of life. Many teachers have

failed to identify themselves with the social problems of our culture. They fail to recognize their responsibility in helping children to become effective participants in a democratic society.

VALUES OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

John's mother felt good about the conference with John's teacher. She liked Mrs. Brown. It pleased her that Mrs. Brown was so interested in John's success. Mrs. Brown had given her such good suggestions. John really needs a different kind of attention, she thought to herself.

John's teacher felt good about the conference. She enjoyed meeting John's mother. John's mother seemed to appreciate the things she told her about John and especially the suggestions she made for ways of helping John.

Parent-teacher conferences bring the home and school closer together. Parents get to know teachers as real people, and teachers get to know parents as real people. On a friendly basis, parents and teachers are able to communicate better and together plan a program for child success.

Through the conferences parents become informed about the goals of the school and the procedures followed to reach those goals. Teachers get to know the aspirations of parents for their children. Working together, parents and teachers have opportunity to build realistic expectancies for each child.

Through the conferences teachers become acquainted with the world through which a child moves, his place in the family, his relations with other people; the factors which are helping or hindering his wholesome development. They are able to plan school experiences for the child which may compensate to some degree for shortcomings in out-of-school life.

Parent-teacher conferences focus attention on the child as an individual. Parents and teachers become more sensitive to each child's assets and liabilities, more sensitive to his needs, and more enthusiastic about planning for each particular child's success. Parent-teacher conferences help to make education a co-operative enterprise between the home and the school.

HOW TO HELP TEACHERS HOLD PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

WILLIAM R. EPSON, *Principal, Garfield School,
Montebello Unified School District*

Conducting regularly scheduled individual conferences with the parents of each of 30 or 40 pupils calls upon all the professional skills of a teacher. An in-service training program designed to help teachers hold conferences with parents should therefore provide teachers opportunities for studying ways to use their professional skills to greatest advantage.

Those responsible for the program may be encouraged in their work by the fact that most teachers like to meet and talk with people and believe that conferences with parents are both desirable and feasible. On the other hand they will find that since teacher education institutions seldom offer courses in conference techniques teachers will have had no preservice training in the field. And since observing a teacher while he is conducting a conference for purposes of appraising his work is considered by many experienced administrators and supervisors to be an undesirable practice, it will be difficult to determine what must be included in the program to give each teacher the help he needs.

The training program should begin by helping teachers feel the necessity of holding regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences. Throughout the program teachers should be helped to discover that parent-teacher conferences are desirable, feasible, and necessary, and should be given opportunity to become proficient in conducting such conferences.

Various procedures are being successfully used to help teachers see the necessity of reporting to parents through parent-teacher conferences. A principal of one elementary school attempts to make his teachers aware of the necessity of parent-

teacher conferences by developing the subject during casual conversations. For example, while observing playground activities he notes that Charles, a third grade boy, regularly succeeds in organizing a kickball game. In talking with Charles' teacher the principal asks how the school might report this rather important accomplishment to Charles' parents. Perhaps this results in the teacher realizing that evidence of leadership is important to report to parents and that the best possible way to report is through face-to-face contact with parents. In certain faculty groups, teachers are asked to present in staff meetings examples of information they have shared with parents during conferences, which they would be unable to present by merely marking a report card.

The in-service program in teacher-parent conferences should help teachers to find answers to questions, such as: What kind of material and how much material should be collected in preparation for a conference? Should examples of a child's best or poorest work be shown to his parents?

Teachers may be helped to find answers to such questions by giving them opportunities to work together in compiling a sample folder of a child's work that they believe could be used to advantage in a conference with a child's parents. The results of the work of several such groups may be shared and evaluated by all members of the faculty.

In the program teachers should be helped to plan conferences. Teachers in the Montebello public schools have reported that by using the plan outlined on the form on the next page they have been able to make preparations for conferences and have been well prepared.

Such a plan encourages the teacher to concentrate his attention on a single pupil in planning each conference and to give appropriate consideration to both the child's strengths and weaknesses. The information recorded is discussed with the child's parents during the conference. Teachers who have collected information according to this plan state that parents are generally impressed with the amount and kind of information

that is compiled concerning their child and eagerly provide information they think will make the record more complete.

Teachers who have had experience in holding regularly scheduled conferences with parents can describe a variety of conference situations that merit special attention. Conferences are held with parents who are passive or aggressive, with parents who are shy, hostile, superior, or dull. They also are held with bright parents of dull children and with parents of children who are achieving far beyond reasonable expectancy.

Parent-Teacher Guidance Report for _____
 _____ Name of child _____ date _____

Teacher	Grade	School
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STRENGTHS

as observed by parent:

as observed by teacher:

NEEDS

as observed by parent:

as observed by teacher:

SUGGESTIONS for home

SUGGESTIONS for school

These are but a few of the conference situations each teacher faces at one time or another. Although with few exceptions, parents are co-operative, many teachers fear the few difficult conferences they must hold. Certain teachers say they fear conferences because they have not been trained to conduct them and do not know the kind of interview technique to use.

What kind of experience should be provided teachers so they may learn and practice good conference techniques? Writing conference scripts is one type of experience that has been successfully used for this purpose. The scripts may be reports of imaginary or actual conferences. Merit will be found in writing imaginary conference scripts, for as a teacher writes a

script of this kind he must change positions in the interview. First he is the teacher who asks a question, then he is the parent who answers. In this process many teachers have been surprised to find that a question they ordinarily use places a parent on the defensive. A few teachers have tape-recorded their scripts, played them for a group, and asked the group for comments regarding the way in which the conferences were handled. One faculty group found that it felt most free to discuss techniques employed in conferences when it evaluated scripts that were prepared by someone who was not in the discussion group.

Since it is sometimes difficult to focus the attention of a discussion group on a particular phase of a report of a conference, excerpts of reports may be used to advantage for this purpose. However, in certain cases reports of entire conferences should be used and teachers encouraged to analyze them for such elements as digressions or insights developed by the participants.

The following excerpts, offered as examples of what might be prepared by the teachers in any group, are from reports of conferences that were written by teachers. Each report is followed by questions of the type that may be used to focus the attention of teachers on specific phases of the reports.

REPORT OF CONFERENCE

PARENT: Hello. Is this Sue's room?

TEACHER: Yes, I'm Sue's teacher, Mrs. Clark. I'm glad that you could come today, Mrs. Dean.

PARENT: I was going to make an appointment with the principal to get at the problems Sue has had since she enrolled here, but I didn't know about these conferences. This certainly comes at the right time.

TEACHER: It's right for me, too, because I need some help. What problems did you have in mind, Mrs. Dean?

PARENT: You've noticed, too? I'd like to know what she's like at school.

TEACHER: Well, any seven-year-old has a little difficulty in getting used to a new neighborhood and a new school, but Sue isn't adjusting as fast as the other children.

PARENT: What do you mean, adjusting?

TEACHER: Well, she seems to get along very well on the playground, but in class she just doesn't seem to be interested. Her record from the last school shows she did good work there. Do you have any ideas about this?

PARENT: She does nothing but complain at home. For the first time in her life she doesn't want to go to school in the morning. When she comes home in the afternoon she is as cross as a bear. She says she hates writing.

TEACHER: That surprises me. She writes well.

PARENT: But you don't *write* at all—you *print*. Sue really wrote at the other school and loved it. She thinks this printing is baby stuff.

TEACHER: In most schools, children in the second grade use manuscript writing.

PARENT: What's that?

TEACHER: Well, there's cursive writing and manuscript writing.

PARENT: Which one is printing?

TEACHER: Manuscript writing. Manuscript writing is based on two simple strokes and—

PARENT: Well, it seems to me that this school and the other one both can't be right about this.

Suggested Questions

1. How did the parent seem to be responding to the explanation about writing?
2. What words seem to be blocking communication? Could other words be used?
3. How could the teacher have gotten the conference back on the track?
4. Of what significance is the parent's final remark?
5. Will most parents use as much pressure as this parent used to secure understandable explanations?

REPORT OF CONFERENCE

TEACHER: Good afternoon, Mrs. Smith. I'm so glad you could come for this interview.

PARENT: Thank you. I've been looking forward to this opportunity to talk with you. I am eager to know how George is getting along.

TEACHER: Talking with parents can be very helpful. I have some of George's work to show you.

PARENT: Do you think that George is doing his best work?

TEACHER: Probably he is, but I am wondering if you feel that there are some ways George might be helped. In the first grade all of the children are meeting new situations and making new adjustments during the first weeks of school. George is eager to try all of the new things.

PARENT: I am sure he is. But George is a high-strung and nervous child—at least, I find that he is at home, especially when he becomes overexcited.

TEACHER: Yes, I've felt that his health and temperament must be considered. I believe that his ideas and keen interest show that he can do superior work. He wants to follow directions and be co-operative. In his writing and coloring, as you can see, he does show difficulty in co-ordination in the handling of pencils and crayons. He is not yet able to keep his attention on his work very long. He can only work for a short time.

Suggested Questions

1. Does the teacher seem to be listening to the parent?
2. What are some ways to determine the extent of the parents' anxiety as indicated by the parents' first three responses?
3. What might be the result of the teacher's criticism if the mother is really anxious about the child?

REPORT OF CONFERENCE

TEACHER: Good afternoon, Mrs. Jones, I'm very happy you could come for the conference today.

PARENT: Oh!

TEACHER: Won't you sit down? (pause) I enjoy having Joe in class and I'm looking forward to sharing some of our ideas about how to help him.

PARENT: I'm glad I could come.

TEACHER: I'd like to show you some of his work. I keep a folder for each pupil and they like knowing that I'm going to show it to their mothers. Here are some of his writ-

ing papers—this is what he did in September, here is a sample from December, and here is one he did last week. Hasn't he shown fine improvement?

PARENT: Um-huh.

TEACHER: Here are some of his arithmetic papers. These drill sheets are very good, but here are some of the word problem papers. He has a little difficulty with these, and I've been wondering if you might be able to help him a little at home.

PARENT: I guess so.

TEACHER: How do you think you could help him?

PARENT: I couldn't, but maybe my husband could.

Suggested Questions

1. Do the teacher's comments regarding Joe's arithmetic and her request for the parent's help seem to be effective attempts to gain parent participation?
2. What are some ways to get shy or passive parents actively involved in a conference?

Role playing presents outstanding opportunity for teachers to practice conference techniques. The preceding or similar scripts of conferences may be used to stimulate a group to role play. When role playing is spontaneous teachers may develop conference techniques which they had not used before, or of which they had not been aware.

The techniques presented are but a few of the ones that might be used in training teachers to conduct conferences with parents. Planning conferences, preparing for conferences, and conducting conferences have been employed. In an adequate program attention must also be given to the content of the conferences. This involves the presentation of information that may be used to answer each phase of the question: What information should be communicated to parents regarding growth and development, the curriculum, behavior patterns, and the other aspects of the school? A well planned and properly developed training program will help teachers to discover that parent-teacher conferences are desirable, feasible, necessary, difficult but tremendously rewarding.

HOW DO CHILDREN FEEL ABOUT REPORTS TO PARENTS?

SYBIL RICHARDSON, *Consultant in Elementary Education, Office of
the County Superintendent of Schools, Los Angeles County*

In the fall of 1954 the Committee on Reporting to Parents of the Cooperative Council on In-Service Education¹ decided to focus its attention upon children's feelings about reports. In preliminary discussions, many ways of assessing children's feelings were considered. Each representative in the committee selected the way of working that seemed best suited to a particular school and community.

In some schools, teachers asked children to write responses to such questions as "What do you think your parents like to hear about at a parent-teacher conference?" In other schools, teachers formulated and used simple questionnaires which called for yes and no answers: "Do you like your parents to have a conference with your teacher?" or "When they do, would you like to be present?" In other schools, teachers interviewed children individually using such questions as "What do you do best in school—how do you know?" or "What does your mother say about your report card?" And in other schools an entire class or a small group of three or four children was given opportunity to discuss selected questions.

Because each member of the committee used the methods which seemed best suited for use in particular schools, the data collected in each of the school situations is presented as a unit rather than all data being presented in composite. As might be expected whatever approach was used, children revealed widely

¹The Council was organized by the University of California, Los Angeles, Extension Division, and by school district administrators for the co-operative study of mutual problems. Representatives from the Hawthorne, Montebello, Wiseburn, Lynwood, West Covina, Pomona, and Pasadena school districts, and from the offices of Superintendents of Schools of Los Angeles and Orange counties contributed materials. The Extension Division of the University made available the services of Helen James to interview children and Nora Weckler as consultant to the committee.

different feelings and attitudes. Teachers explained these variations on the basis of differences in the children's abilities and in their experiences with success and failure and the emphasis which adults placed upon grades and reports.

Committee members reported many reasons why it was difficult to employ a uniform procedure in conducting the inquiry of children's attitudes toward reports of their progress in school. As teachers began to explore children's attitudes, their sensitivity to the problems involved in reporting quickened and they immediately began to modify their conference and reporting procedures. Several times the children's responses, while humorous, shocked the teachers, for the responses were so far removed from the opinions they held regarding children's understandings of marks, reports, and parent conferences. In such instances teachers at once took steps to help the children understand the purposes of report cards and of conferences with parents.

As children are encouraged to express their feelings about reports, they reveal much information regarding their relationship with their parents and the supportive or critical attitudes they feel at home. The children's perception of teachers, too, as friendly and helpful or as unkind and unjust are quickly discovered. Many teachers are surprised at the children's interpretation of approval or censure and at the impact which casual reprimands may have upon a child's feeling about himself. The child's feeling about himself as acceptable and worthwhile or as somehow an unsatisfactory person is clearly seen.

SOME GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT CHILDREN'S FEELINGS

As the committee reviewed the records of children's oral and written responses to a variety of questions some generalizations seem to be clearly supported.

Many Children Want Their Parents and Teachers to Know One Another

Children in several primary grades were encouraged to draw pictures about recent parent-teacher conferences. The teachers

recorded children's comments as they showed their pictures. "This is our schoolroom. This is mother and Mrs. B. talking. Mother said she was glad to come." Another child who drew a scene explained, "Mother was pleased because I had done so well." A picture of the school complete with flag accompanied the comment, "This is mother coming to school. This is Mrs. B. standing by mother. She likes to come." The records of primary teachers consistently reveal young children's eagerness to have their mothers and teachers know one another.

When 70 fifth-grade children in one small city district were asked, "Do you like your parents to have a conference with the teacher?" only two said no. More than half of the 68 children who liked parent-teacher conferences indicated that they wanted the teacher to talk to their parents about their grades and work. Others wrote such comments as: "I like them to talk about my weakest subject and how they can help me."

A questionnaire was used with 460 children in the second through the sixth grades of another school district. An overwhelming majority, 82 per cent, responded yes to "I like my mother to have a conference with my teacher;" 57 per cent would like the teacher to have a conference with the father, and 70 per cent indicated they would like the conference to be with both parents. Most of the children, 90 per cent, agreed with the statement, "My parents help me after a conference," and 86 per cent agreed that "My mother understands me better after she has a conference with my teacher."

In the same district, 248 junior high school pupils were asked to rate their preference for conferences including (a) parent-teacher; (b) teacher, parent, and student; (c) teacher, both parents, and student; (d) teacher and student only; and (e) any other. Strongest preference was shown for parent-teacher conferences by 110 students, 44 per cent; 75 students, 30 per cent, gave first preference to teacher-parent-student; and 10, 4 per cent, wanted to include both parents. Thus more than three-fourths, 78 per cent, of these junior high pupils indicated a preference for a conference which included parents.

While the per cent favoring parent-teacher conferences is less than that reported for elementary grades the decrease seems to relate to the young adolescent's desire to be included in the conference. These results do not indicate the aversion to parent-teacher conferences commonly attributed to junior high pupils provided the pupil himself is included. Only 45 pupils, 18 per cent, wanted to exclude the parent, preferring a conference of teacher and pupil alone.

*Some Children Want to Take Part
in Parent-Teacher Conferences*

When asked, "Would you like to attend when your teacher has a conference with your parents?" 61 fifth grade children said yes, and only 9, no. Typical explanations were, "I like to hear what she says about me and to find out if I am good or bad" and "I like to know my faults."

When 460 children in the second through the sixth grades of one elementary school were asked whether they would like to be at the conference, 54 per cent said yes and only 33 per cent, no. The per cent of pupils indicating a desire to take part in the conference, however, decreases steadily with age, ranging from 90 per cent of the second grade children to 42 per cent in the sixth grade. While most of the children, 73 per cent, disagreed with the statement, "I would be embarrassed to be present at the conference," these per cents too, show a consistent change with grade. None of the younger children agreed with this statement while 25 per cent of the children in the sixth grade concurred. A similar statement, "I think it best for me to be present at the conference but I would be afraid" yielded similar results. More than three-fourths of all children, (77 per cent) disagreed with this statement, although the per cent of agreements increased from none in the second grade to 26 per cent in the sixth grade. Thus while many children express a desire to attend the parent-teacher conference, the number who admit feelings of embarrassment and fear increases as adolescence is approached.

Similar questions were asked 248 junior high school pupils. When asked to indicate their preferences, almost a third, 30 per cent, gave first choice to conferences including teacher, parent, and student. Their reasons indicate their growing sense of self-confidence and independence. Frequent comments were, "I want to hear everything that goes on," 16 children; "I want an opportunity to explain my difficulties, ask questions, tell my side," 13 children. In the same group, 18 per cent indicated a first preference for conferences including the teacher and student only, adding as reasons "I will be able to understand my grades and problems," 10 affirmative responses; "My parents get angry, misunderstand or punish," 11 affirmative responses; "I don't want to be embarrassed," 10 affirmative responses. Thus 44 per cent of these junior high school pupils express a definite desire to take an active part in conferences with teachers whether or not the parents are included.

Some Children Are Anxious About Parent-Teacher Conferences

When a conference program is begun, teachers and parents are often primarily concerned about their own feelings of uneasiness or satisfaction. Only later does it seem to occur to the adults that the children too are deeply involved and are often uneasy and anxious about all that may be happening in the conference. To the statement, "I worry about the conference when my work isn't very good"—54 per cent of 460 elementary children said yes. The per cent agreeing increases steadily from 30 per cent of the second grade to 62 per cent of the sixth grade children. Even though their work is good, one-fourth of the children, 25 per cent, admit they worry about conferences.

A few children, 5 per cent, admit that they are afraid to have their parents talk to the teacher, 7 per cent are afraid of what their mother might say to the teacher, and 11 per cent are afraid of what the teacher might say to their parents. Another aspect of this uneasiness is indicated by the 70 per cent "yes" responses to the statement, "I would like to know

what my report is like before my parents see it," and the 63 per cent who agree that "I would feel better if my teacher would explain my report to me alone." Twenty-six per cent say "I feel uncomfortable after my mother has a conference because she doesn't tell me what happened." This per cent increases from 10 per cent of the second grade to 28 per cent of the sixth grade children.

A fifth grade group of 39 children was asked for written responses to the questions, "Do you feel nervous or angry or excited when you know your parents are going to see the teacher? Does it make you feel happy?"

The responses of 17 children indicated that they felt happy or good at the prospect of parent-teacher conferences. The children added such explanations as, "They find out how I am doing and my weaknesses and help me." "It makes me feel better to know what to study." "I feel happy that the teacher can tell what I'm good in."

Eight children said that they didn't care or that they were not bothered. As one child remarked, "I just feel normal." Certain children, however, qualified their indifference by adding, "If I know I've been good," "I'm worried only if I've been bad" and "It doesn't bother me but it doesn't make me real happy."

The responses of 14 children admitted nervousness and excitement with such explanations as, "I feel nervous because I don't know what they're going to talk about," "I don't know if it helps my grade," and "I feel nervous because she gives me a good lecture if it's bad, and I know I will get punished if it's very bad."

There are many indications that these anxieties are minimized when the teacher has done careful planning with students. In one elementary school, pupil-teacher conferences followed by parent-teacher-pupil conferences have been planned for several years. Eighth grade children were asked to write their reactions to the topic, "Reports and Conferences." The results of teacher-pupil evaluation are reflected in the following samples which are typical of this group's discussion.

I prefer conferences to report cards because in conferences you are able to talk about your subjects with both parents and teachers. In conferences you can find out your weak points and how to correct them. With report cards if you see a *D* or *F* on your card, you think you have proved a failure. I remember when I was in the lower grades I used to have nightmares about my report cards. I would dread to open my report card to see what it said. When I had report cards I did not feel free to talk over my grades either with my teacher or my parents. With conferences I feel free to talk over any subject grade with either teacher or parent. In report cards the grades you get are mostly on subjects. In conferences everything is considered such as your hobbies and how you get along with others. I think conferences are much better than report cards.—Carol (age 14)

I prefer the conferences because when we had report cards some of the other children would run up to you and say let's see your report card. If it wasn't good you wouldn't want them to see it. Now that we have conferences the teacher tells you what's wrong, we talk it over and we can come to a solution about what can be done to solve any problems. The conference also brings the student closer to the teachers. When you get a *D* or an *F* you would think she didn't like you and you would go away pouting about your grades, but now the teacher tells you why and what you can do better. The answer is almost always, "work harder."—Ellen (age 14)

If I were to begin the eighth grade again, I would prefer having the parent-teacher, teacher-pupil conferences. I feel as though I would accomplish and understand more of my schoolwork, and understand myself to a greater degree.

When we had report cards, it was much easier for both teacher and pupil. During those years, I knew if I was passing, but I didn't know my good and bad points, unless the teacher pointed them out. With the conference plan, the teacher and pupil have a closer understanding about the pupil's work. I also feel as though I *must* do my best work, because I have to face my teacher and my parents with my daily grades. In my opinion, the conferences help eliminate what every student despises—"teacher's pets." When the pupil-teacher conference is held, the pupil has a chance to express his view. This leads to grades that are more fair.

If I were to become an eighth grader again, I would want the conference method for grading. I realize that the teacher must put out more effort for each pupil. This method brings a closer understanding between the school and home. With this understanding, we can improve in scholarship and citizenship.—Peggy (age 13)

I prefer having my mother come to school for a conference instead of a report card. I think the mothers learn more about their child. If you have a report card you just see the grades A, B, C, D and F and sign it. If your mother comes to school she learns of sportsmanship, grades, social ability, and whether you get along with your teacher and classmates. It also gives the mothers a chance to meet the teacher. This year when my mother had her conference she looked the schoolroom over. She said if they have conferences they can see the school more often. The mothers and fathers went to school quite awhile ago, and therefore they like to come to school to see the teachers and the room. If the teacher sees the mother she can know more about the child.

Two years ago when we had report cards every child was showing each other what grades he or she got. This made many pupils develop an inferiority complex. I think the conference is a much better idea and I think it should be encouraged. When your mother comes for a conference she can see each individual paper and not just a piece of tagboard with grades on it.

Before each conference with the mother our teacher has an individual conference with each child in the class.

I also think the children try harder so the mothers can be proud. I think we'd have a more intelligent world if conferences were encouraged.—Bette (age 13)

Children Want Their Parents to Appreciate Their Efforts and to Understand Them Better

In June, the children in one third grade were asked to write on "What we think of our report cards." Of the 29 children responding more than half, 18, commented regarding their parents' feelings as, "Mother and father think my work is very good," "My mother and father think my grades on my report card are very bad so I am going to work harder," or "My mother said next time she wants me to get an E."

Children Frequently Are Uncertain About What "Marks" Mean, Other than Approval or Disapproval

In a sampling of over 70 children who were interviewed in small groups few of the children could recall the specific categories in which they received good or poor marks. In discussion, they compare the numbers of each kind of symbol received but seem less interested in the strengths or weaknesses which the marks presumably indicate. For instance, when a panel of five third-grade children were asked, "In your room what do S and N mean?" the following answers were given:

"I never found it out—N is for good behavior, I think."

"I don't know."

"S is for safety, N is for——."

"My mother told me all they're for—S is for satisfactory, N is for——."

"I don't know what N means."

Many other young children's understandings are well expressed by the first grade boy who answered quickly, "S is good, and N is no good." With age and increased help from teachers, children gained increased understanding of their abilities and needs. The records of interviews and discussions, however, reveal that many upper grade children are confused. One sixth grade child remarked to the interviewer, "There's one thing on that card about 'finds and selects materials' and I don't know what that means. The funny thing is I always get an S in it." The other children in the group were unable to help although one ventured, "Maybe it's choosing library books," and another said, "I know it isn't art because it has a separate mark."

Some of the discussion records reveal ideas which were apparently well understood among children but were surprising to adults. Many children, for instance, are concerned with "talking too much." One sixth grade child in a class where the children had just marked their own cards said, "I've been talking too much but there's not a grade for talking. I would have given myself an N—I did mark myself N in 'Works well alone'."

Another child rejoined, "I talk a lot but I get an S in 'Works well alone'." "I've improved though—there should be a special place for 'Talking' on the card." In another school five children representing three sixth grade classes discussed similar questions. When one child remarked, "I get mine on talking too much—not on studies," his friend replied, "Well, you were new in school and had to get acquainted, didn't you?" Later on in the discussion another child said, "I think self-control is the hardest one of all. The kids at our table sure tell good jokes and I laugh." One child thought "You could tell the N's and how many you would get by the group you're in." But quick disagreement was expressed: "No, you can't either tell by your group—all five kids at my table got N's in self-control, but I didn't because I don't tell as many jokes, I guess." All of the group agreed, however, that "a lot of times other people make you get N's in self-control."

Many of these comments suggest the correctness of de Solar's¹ conclusion that children are not aware of the broad objectives which their parents and teachers hold for them, but are impressed by daily reminders and reprimands about less important behavior.

Parents Vary Widely in Their Attitudes Toward Marks and Conferences

In the study of 460 elementary school children, 16 per cent of the children said their parents make them feel bad after they have had a conference with their teachers, 26 per cent said, "I feel uncomfortable after my mother has a conference with my teacher because she doesn't tell me what happened"; 34 per cent complained because their parents "do not say anything to me about my work."

The discussion records of five children in the sixth grade who were asked "Do your mothers ever say anything special about your report cards?" show wide differences in the reception given children's reports at home. "My mother blew a fuse

¹ Charlotte de Solar, *Parents and Teachers Appraise Children*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, Bureau of Publications.

over that N but that was all." "My mother seems pretty serious when she comes home from the conference and she talks it over with Dad, but sometimes he just laughs and says it isn't so bad and then she gets sore. With an N I'm a little scared." "I'm not scared with an N, but boy! that conference!" "I get 50 cents for every S and pay a dollar if I get an N." (Who gives you this?) "My Grandad, but then I tell my Dad and sometimes he doesn't know I got the money already and he pays me too." "Well, at my place it's up to my father. He tells me to improve if I get an N and says he will help me do homework. He doesn't seem so very worried but he always notices when I change from an N to an S. I don't even have to show him." "I've gotten just one report card at this school and my mother say I'll get 20 dollars if I get straight S's by the end of the year. Boy, was she mad when I got three N's!" (What does your mother think N means?) "I think she thinks it is about like a C but she still gets mad." "I wait for my mother after the conference and we walk home together. We talk about it and when we get home we go over it. She tells me how good those S's are. Sometimes my father says I should do a little homework."

In small group discussions with over 70 children in grades one through six, frequent mentions were made of rewards with money or gifts for marks that are considered "good." Many children apparently feel their parents get "mad at them" for poor marks and this is often accompanied by corporal punishment or deprivation of privileges. Children seemed to recognize that there is little consistency among parents regarding what is considered to be good or poor marks.

Some Implications for Classroom Practice and for Further Study

Discussion of the results of this exploration of children's feelings with teachers and comparison of different practices suggest several topics pertaining to reporting pupils' progress that should be studied further.

Children and Parents Need More Help in Understanding Marks on Report Cards

Children, particularly in the upper grades, expressed a strong need for individual conferences with their teachers to understand their progress and to interpret their report cards. The gap between the terms used on report cards and children's understanding of acceptable or unacceptable behavior suggests that teachers should study children's thinking about their behavior. Through group discussions, conferences, responses to questions, and painting or other expressive activities, children might be encouraged to reveal their feelings and attitudes about themselves. Teachers are then in a stronger position to help children develop insights that are both more realistic and constructive. Children's written descriptions of what they are learning at school and their analysis of their own competencies and immediate needs are valuable supplements to report cards. When report cards are being revised the use of children's statements should result in language and behavior categories more meaningful to both parents and children.

Where teachers hold periodic class discussions about the symbols used and growth categories listed on report cards, children showed clearer knowledge and were better able to interpret themselves and their school work to parents. The practice of children rating themselves and comparing their ratings with the teacher's seems a promising one. Conferences with those children whose ratings differ greatly from those of their teacher could be used to determine why the difference and what rating might be most nearly correct.

In view of the widely differing attitudes of parents toward report cards, the school should take responsibility in creating greater unity in the attitudes. Parent-teacher association meetings, conferences with parents of children in a class, and bulletins might be used to suggest constructive ways for parents to receive children's report cards.

Both parents and teachers might consider the multiple causes for children's unsatisfactory growth since the implied assump-

tion of rewards and punishments is that the responsibility is solely the child's. Parents might be actively involved in studying children's reactions to marks and the effects of report cards upon attitudes toward school. Diaries and logs periodically kept by parents and children would make adult expectancies for children's behavior more realistic.¹

*Children Should be More Actively Involved in
Conferences with Teachers and Parents*

Children's feelings about conferences should be studied before conferences are scheduled. Group discussions, reaction stories, interviews, and written responses are some of the ways in which children may reveal their anxieties or questions. After such exploratory study, children can be actively involved in planning the conference program and in preparing their parents for the conferences. As children understand the multiple purposes of conferences their anxieties diminish.

Children, particularly in the upper grades, might take part in conferences as they indicate their willingness to do so. With teacher guidance many children, even those in the primary grades, develop clear ideas of the role they might play. "I could show how I write my words and what I do in free time"—(Second grade child); "I'd show mother how I read and the teacher could explain how I'm doing" (Third grade child); and "You could discuss problems you have in school." The teacher would get information which will give her ideas about what to discuss in class and help her to understand each child"—(Sixth grade child). As children understand their role, they display less suspicion and resentment regarding the conference.

The children's report of the different effects of the conference at home and their concern about their parents interpretation of the conference suggest that some tangible evidence is needed to supplement the conference. A conference record, an outline of goals, description of activities characteristic of the age group, or a letter written by the child would stress the

¹For a study of children's responses to questions about themselves see: Arthur T. Jersild, *In Search of Self: An Exploration of the Role of the School in Promoting Self-understanding*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952.

importance of the conference and give the child's parents more security in reporting the conference to other family members.

Members of the committee are convinced that children's feelings and understandings about reports to parents should be continuously explored. Teachers should be encouraged to provide many opportunities for children to talk about the school activities which are difficult for them and to evaluate their own progress and needs. Marks and reports deeply affect children's security and self-respect and their attitudes and motivation for learning. Teachers should feel justified, therefore, in spending adequate time in group activities and in individual conferences with children to make sure that the children are developing clear understandings of marks and reports that are made to their parents.

WHAT SHOULD PARENTS KNOW ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S PROGRESS IN SCHOOL?

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"How is my boy doing?" a father asked of his son's third grade teacher. Thousands of teachers are asked this question many times each year. The question carries hope, pride, and anxiety, and has no easy answer. To reply that "Tommy is getting along just fine" or that "Tommy is having a little difficulty in learning to read," does not satisfy sincere and eager parents. Just what do they want to know and what information should the teacher give them?

If this father had been asked just what he wanted to know about his son he would have replied. "The facts, of course. I want to know how my child compares with other children. I want to know whether he is bright, average or slow, and what I can expect of him as a grown man. I want to know what talents he has and what weaknesses, and whether he is learning as well as can be expected."

Such questions seem straight-forward, direct, and reasonable. Unfortunately, however, the questions are simple to ask and extremely difficult to answer. Facts such as this father wants are difficult to give because there is so little that is absolute about a child and grave injustice may be done by using a straw in the wind as a definite indication of future development. To say that a child is bright or dull, talented in art, or slow to read, may be true today but not true next month or next year. The fact that an infant walks or talks at nine or ten months is no guarantee that he will be superior in these characteristics when he is twelve or when he is an adult. Many children who are slow to learn at first become adept at learning as they mature.

¹ On leave 1955-1956 as Consultant in In-service Education, University Extension, University of California, Los Angeles.

This does not mean that no valid predictive measures are available. But it does mean that teachers must use such measures over a long enough period of time to be fairly sure before they give so-called "facts" to parents. An exact score or rating has value for the teacher who must plan for various levels of instruction but the particular score may be so transient as to have little value for parents. Except in the case of extreme deviation, such as mental retardation or unusual talent, judgment expressed regarding the young child's probable direction of growth may be misleading.

Did you ever ask a physician his prognosis for a patient? The more scientific and ethical the doctor, the more qualified are his predictions. "If all goes well," he may say, "the disease will probably run like this, but should this or that happen, the outlook for the patient will be entirely different." It is just so with children's development. The initial direction and progress of a child may be greatly modified by circumstances. For a teacher to judge a child's relative ability and competence, except for temporary instructional purposes, and to pass this judgment on to his parents may be highly detrimental to both the child and the parents. Such premature judgment may be wrong but even though early judgments later prove to have validity, they often distort the parents' appraisal of their child.

The teacher, like the doctor, can, with integrity, only state the facts of the moment for the young child. "Your boy understands certain number combinations." Or "He is afraid to play on the swings." Or "He is reading a book usually read in the second grade." In time such facts added one upon another reveal the more permanent characteristics of a human being. Enough such facts cast a shadow ahead that may be a valid prediction of life in the future. The upper-grade or the high school teacher may be able to say to parents, "Your boy has shown consistent ability and interest in science; perhaps his future career is in some scientific pursuit."

Not only are judgments regarding children's abilities, which many parents believe they want, difficult for teachers to give, but they are equally difficult for parents to receive. Few parents

can or should accept as final the necessary and temporary objective analyses which teachers make of the children they instruct. The most essential quality of the parent-child relationship is love. Although love need not be blind, the vision must be blurred a little. To love is to believe that the person is worthy of love, to see him in a gentle light, and to help him over the rough spots with hope and encouragement. To be constantly comparing, rating, and coldly analyzing a child threatens this relationship. If parents become too analytical they may value and love one child more than another or they may give or withdraw love according to the child's ability to achieve or produce.

Fortunately most parents find it impossible to be completely objective or analytical about their children. Any accomplishment of a child that is less than what they consider desirable and normal, parents are likely to judge to be the fault of the teacher, the school, or the educational system. This parental placing of blame makes it rough going sometimes for teachers and administrators but it has been a face-saving practice that parents have used ever since schools have been in existence. While this frequently undeserved blame may be difficult for conscientious educators to accept, it often saves children from harsh evaluations and preserves parents' confidence in their sons and daughters. Sometimes parents' criticism of teachers and schools is deserved, occasionally such criticism changes the character of an educational system, but frequently in placing blame on the schools, parents really are saying, "We believe in our children."

The parents of children who are doing extremely well in school are the most eager for teachers' judgments and the most willing to accept ratings and scores. Few parents whose children are average or below average in endowment and achievement are able to accept the implications of the normal curve of distribution of talents, energy, and accomplishment. Most parents believe that their children are better than the "run of the mill" and that if the children do not achieve up to their expectations someone is at fault. Unjust criticism of teaching methods and

unwarranted pressure on children are frequently the results of a comparative system of marking which rates children as better or worse than their classmates.

Modern educational leaders and child psychologists recognize the injustices and dangers of such systems and encourage teachers to try more scientific and more psychologically sound methods of reporting to parents. The teacher of today has a more professional role in regard to both pupils and parents than the teacher of the past. He is an educator in the fullest sense of the word. He is a psychological guide and interpreter of youth. He does not simply instruct and then judge the child's ability to assimilate the instruction. This new role places new responsibilities on the teacher in methods of teaching and in working with parents as well.

The teacher knows that Tommy's father's questions must be answered; that parents have a right and a need to know all the information which these questions imply. But the teacher also recognizes the dangers in premature or arbitrary judgment and in the fragmentary and partial insight that results from a mere statement or a symbol indicating a child's relative accomplishment in a group.

The teacher of today, because of his professional background and knowledge, recognizes as does the physician that not only the status of the child must be told but also the causes, the treatment, and the probable prognosis of each child's developmental problems. Both the teacher and the doctor need the case history, scientific tests, and professional insight to do this. They need time to interpret their findings to the parents concerned. But most important, they need the skill to interpret their findings and their professional opinions in such a way that they will serve as constructive guides for parents.

All these professional responsibilities require special training for teachers, administrative planning, and a program of interpretation to the public of the reasons for these innovations in school procedure. Like all changes that upset tradition and affect many people these innovations often meet with misunderstanding and resistance in some quarters. The problem for

educators, however, is no longer traditional report cards versus reporting to parents through face-to-face contacts. Educators and child psychologists are convinced of the desirability of parent-teacher conferences. The major issues involve the improvement of the conference skills of the teacher, the organization of time for individual parent-teacher conferences, and a public relations program which helps parents to understand the reasons for inaugurating such changes in the reporting system.

And so, Tommy's teacher replies to the question, "How is my son doing?" by presenting organized evidence of Tommy's stage of growth. He shows Tommy's father samples of Tommy's work, anecdotal records of his behavior, the results of achievement tests he has taken and helps the father to see what they might mean. Through this intimate contact the teacher safeguards the pride of this father in what Tommy is and does and shows the father how to help Tommy over rough spots which he could not get over alone.

All parents want to understand their children. They must understand them if they are going to help them through the years to plan their education, choose their careers, make successful marriages and other life adjustments. Uninterpreted facts or premature judgments expressed in symbols, scores, or statements, are not the answer to parents' earnest search for the knowledge that will enable them to give effective guidance to their child. Although few parents are able to pin down just what it is they should know about their children the teacher should realize that parents must have pride in their children as it is this pride that nourishes a healthy parent-child relationship. All parents want to glow either secretly or among their friends over the good qualities of their offspring. Every parent wants to help his child if he needs it and if definite help can be given. If parents have pride in their children, if they recognize their children's small steps of progress, and know how to help them overcome their difficulties, they are prepared to provide the consistent and affectionate guidance that all young people need.

PROBLEMS IN ORGANIZING PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

NORA WECKLER, *Professor of Psychology, Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts and Sciences*

During the 1954-55 school year the Co-operative Council on In-service Education Committee on Reporting to Parents¹ studied the problems faced by public school administrative personnel in organizing and conducting programs of parent-teacher conferences as a means of reporting pupil progress. In the spring of 1955 the committee collected from teachers who had enrolled in an extension course entitled "The Parent-Teacher Conference," offered by the University of California, Los Angeles, in several locations in southern California, data concerning their attitudes toward reporting pupil progress through parent-teacher conferences. Opinions on the desirability of this practice were also obtained from teachers working in schools where such conferences were already being held. The report that follows is based on the findings of this committee.

WHAT INFORMATION WAS REPORTED BY TEACHERS ENROLLED IN THE COURSE?

Most of the teachers who took the course offered by the University worked in schools where an organized program of conferences with parents as a means of reporting pupil progress is in effect. In reports made by the teachers there was indication that they strongly favored a conference program regardless of whether a program of parent conferences was in operation in the school in which they were teaching. Many teachers suggested ways in which their school's program of conferences could be improved. Certain teachers stated they knew of no readily accessible channels available for them to communicate

¹The author served as consultant to the Council's Committee on Reporting to Parents during the school year 1954-55.

their idea to the administrative personnel of their schools regarding the desirability of parent-teacher conferences or how the program used might be improved. This reaction on the part of teachers suggests that other persons including parents and pupils probably have suggestions along the same line.

HOW DOES A SCHOOL DISTRICT INITIATE A PROGRAM OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES?

Although the ultimate decision to introduce a systemwide conference program rests with the school administration, the initiative for requesting such an extension may come from teachers, parents, parent-teacher associations, or other community groups, or even from pupils. The extent of the encouragement will depend upon how much opportunity pupils and parents have had to appreciate the value of teacher-parent conferences and how much encouragement they have had to express their feelings and opinions to the school administration.

Certain school administrators study the desirability of parent-teacher conferences with their professional associates and decide to institute a program. After working out the details they simply announce to teachers and the community that beginning with the next school year parent-teacher conferences will either wholly or partially replace written reports to parents.

Other administrators decide without extensive consultation with the staff to institute a program of regular parent-teacher conferences but ask faculty members and community people to work out details of *how* to implement the program. The administrators inform the people of all the factors they have considered in reaching their decision and the problems which appear to need solution. Then faculty and parents are given opportunity to seek solutions that seem to meet the needs of everyone best.

Still other administrators have found it valuable to involve both faculty and other members of the community in studies of reporting practices prior to any decision to change the method in current use. They form committees of all the persons in-

volved and the recommendations of the committees provide the basis for any new administrative policies on reporting practices. Committee members are encouraged to report their findings to the groups they represent. This procedure insures consensus of the various interested persons and leads to more general support or the administration in its final policy decisions.

Nearly all school districts have found it necessary to prepare parents for individual conferences with teachers by something more than a written announcement. Face-to-face contacts with school personnel can help parents to overcome their anxieties about discussing their child with the teacher, as well as help them to see the merits of a conference program. Certain schools call a general meeting for all parents at the beginning of the school year. Others, instead of, or in addition to calling a general meeting, organize group conferences between the teacher and the parents of all the pupils in a particular classroom. These group conferences provide an opportunity for the parents to become acquainted with the teacher and enable them to learn in a more intimate and friendly way the purpose of conferences, how they will be conducted, and the responsibilities of the parents. The teacher also uses the opportunity such a meeting provides to describe the curriculum program for the grade.

HOW WELL SHOULD TEACHERS BE PREPARED FOR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES?

One difficulty of instituting a program of parent-teacher conferences is lack of training of the teachers in conducting conferences. Teachers are understandably reluctant to engage in an activity for which they feel unprepared. But administrators have found that once teachers have conducted a series of conferences they gain confidence in their ability. Therefore, at some point it is usually necessary for the administrators to arrive at a decision to use parent-teacher conferences and realize that teachers will feel more secure as the program moves ahead successfully.

In certain cases where the faculties in all the schools in a district are not equally ready to carry out a full program of con-

ferences, the staff of schools that express readiness for the program have gone ahead. The district administration has taken the responsibility to help the other schools prepare for ultimate participation by promoting workshops for principals, district-wide discussion groups for faculty, and study programs for parents.

Requiring teachers to confer with parents is not likely to insure an effective outcome. At the present time, few colleges and universities provide preservice training for teachers in the art of holding conferences. Most school districts have provided their own in-service workshops and discussion groups to meet this need. This year, for the first time, the University of California, Los Angeles, at the request of school districts, has instituted a field course for teachers on parent-teacher conferences. The course, which carries university credit, provides teachers with an opportunity to secure training under the guidance of instructors thoroughly familiar with the understandings and skills required to conduct successful conferences with parents. Since the course is given in the school district which asks for it, the content and organization is generally adapted to local needs.

School people have also found that various written aids help increase the effectiveness of conferences. Experience has shown that teachers benefit most if they develop their own conference forms and supplementary materials as a group project. Among useful materials that have been developed by committees of teachers are the following:

1. A teacher's guide sheet for each child, with appropriate headings, to be filled in prior to the conference
2. Lists of characteristics of boys and girls at different age levels. Such lists are most helpful if these characteristics are described in terms of specific behaviors. They help teachers to identify possible problems in their early stages and to find strengths in pupils that might otherwise be overlooked.
3. An outline of the school program to help parents understand the goals of the school and the ways in which the school works to attain these goals

4. A reminder sheet of effective and ineffective conference techniques
5. A form to report what actually took place at the conference. Ample space is provided for the contributions made by parents. One copy of this report is often given to the parents, the other is retained in the cumulative folder.

HOW WILL TEACHERS HAVE TIME FOR CONFERENCES?

Although administrators, teachers, parents, and pupils may all agree on the value of teacher-parent conferences as a means of reporting pupil progress, one of the main obstacles in establishing such a program is to provide time for teachers to hold the conferences. Meeting with parents individually takes considerably more time than filling in report cards. Effective preparation for the meeting is time-consuming. Ideally, a teacher should collect materials for each child, get specific examples of his strengths and weaknesses, develop testable hypotheses concerning why the child responds the way he does, work out specific suggestions concerning ways in which parents and teacher can work together to foster maximum development of the child, and finally devise a plan concerning how this material can best be presented to a particular parent.

Teachers have found that the preparation required for a successful conference is of immeasurable value in increasing the effectiveness of their classroom teaching. The increase in home-school understanding and co-operation brought about by conferences also makes teaching easier and pupil progress greater. Usually, however, the teachers' work load and class enrollment is so heavy that it is almost impossible for them to realize their full effectiveness as teachers.

School districts vary considerably in the extent to which they adjust schedules to meet teacher needs. In certain districts, for example, little or no adjustment is made in the teachers' loads to provide them time for conferences and the teachers are required to conduct conferences after the regular school hours. Certain schools begin a week earlier in the fall; once each

semester a three-day holiday for pupils is declared for teachers to confer with parents. A method which seems to be increasing in popularity is to have pupils attend school for a minimum day and the remainder of the day is devoted to parent-teacher conferences. This plan has certain advantages. Teachers are not so tired after teaching a minimum day as they would be after a full day and more time is available for the conferences. In addition, when teachers confer with parents a few hours a day for several days, there is less likelihood that conferences will be reduced to a stereotyped, automatic performance.

Teachers who have had experience in conferences with parents are generally enthusiastic about them and are willing to devote the extra time they require. But they are concerned about how they can maintain, let alone increase, their teaching effectiveness under the pressures they are experiencing. Teachers have many suggestions about how these pressures might be reduced. Among those most frequently mentioned are the following:

1. Reduce the size of classes. For many years, the maximum pupil load for effective teaching has been regarded as 30. Teachers feel that, if they are to carry out an effective conference program, 30 is the absolute maximum.
2. Provide sufficient clerical assistance so that the valuable time of professionally trained personnel will not be occupied with work that can be efficiently handled by secretarial personnel.
3. Reduce the number of interruptions to classroom activities. Apparently, school administrators could do much to encourage respect for the sanctity of the classroom as a place of learning.
4. Provide a reasonable daily schedule for teachers so that they have some time for relaxation.
5. Increase the availability of substitute teachers to enable regular teachers to have time during school hours to prepare for parent-teacher conferences. Certain school districts hire substitute teachers on a permanent basis. Their regular availability makes it possible for regular teachers to plan more systematically for their use.

6. Make the period in which conferences are to be held somewhat flexible. To insist that all conferences take place within a limited period of time may place undue hardships on parents as well as teachers and in some cases may not be in the best interests of the pupil. Perhaps all that is required to insure orderliness is a final date by which time all conferences for that semester should be completed.

HOW FREQUENTLY DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR SHOULD CONFERENCES BE HELD?

The answer to the question "how frequently during the school year should conferences be held" depends partially on whether conferences supplement other methods of reporting pupil progress or whether they are the principal method. Since most parents invest great feeling in their children's report cards, school administrators have usually found it wise to maintain these for a time after a conference program has been introduced. A frequent practice is to schedule conferences at mid-semester and to send home written reports at the end of the semester. The benefits of conferences to teacher, parent, and pupil are not likely to be realized if they are held less frequently than twice a year. Whether they should be held more often depends on whether other means of reporting pupil progress are employed, whether teachers have the time for more conferences with parents, and how easy it is for parents to participate.

Teachers may always hold additional conferences with parents whose children have special needs. Sometimes, however, the child may require specialized help that neither parent nor teacher can provide. The solution then lies, not in conferring with the parent more frequently, but in parents and teacher agreeing to refer the child to a person who can provide the help needed. Teachers need to know what services are available and the channels through which referrals are to be made. They should be prepared to inform parents the procedures to follow in getting their children referred to the proper authorities for services.

WHERE SHOULD CONFERENCES BE HELD?

The place generally recommended for a conference is the teacher's classroom. Here, the teacher is on home ground and is likely to feel most comfortable. The learning materials, collection of work done by the pupil, and the teacher's records are readily available.

Unfortunately, half-day sessions may make the classroom unavailable for conferences. Under these, or other circumstances, all kinds of other arrangements have been made. Conferences should be held in a place which insures privacy for the persons involved. Both teacher and parent feel uncomfortable if they are interrupted or think their conversation is being overheard. One school in which the classrooms were otherwise occupied solved the space problem by having several conferences going on at the same time in one large room. This arrangement appeared to be superior to holding only two conferences together in the same room or to having conferences in a room in which interruptions were frequent.

Many administrators report reluctance to ask teachers to conduct conferences in the parents' homes. They believe such conferences may be an imposition on teachers and on parents as well. In the community in which conferences in the home have become a tradition they appear to meet little resistance. Whatever the situation, care must be taken that parents are neither offended or embarrassed. Home conferences may be the only way in which the teacher can ever see the parents. Such visits also enable the teacher to get greater insight into the home backgrounds of the children.

When parents come to the school for conferences, it is important that they have a comfortable place to wait outside the room where conferences are being held. Chairs should be provided as well as some way for them to pass the time. Parent-teacher associations have often taken responsibility of providing refreshments for waiting parents. Reading material can always be made available.

Many parents find it difficult to come to conferences because they have no way of caring for their children. Arrangements should be made to care for the children at the school with adequate supervision.

HOW CAN THE SCHOOL HELP PARENTS TO COME TO CONFERENCES?

The chief problem in securing parental co-operation in conferences in the beginning is to convince them that the experience is really going to be worth while. In general, schools have discovered that the longer a conference program is in effect, the greater the attendance. Conferences tend to sell themselves to parents. The more conferences satisfy the needs of parents and prove helpful to them, the more parents will want to come.

When both parents are employed outside of the home it may be necessary to make special arrangements to meet with them. Scheduling conferences in the evening or on Saturday provides one solution. When schools have prepared the community adequately for a conference program, business establishments may co-operate to provide released time for parents to attend.

Arrangements may need to be made also for parents who live at a great distance from the school and have no adequate means of transportation. Parent-teacher associations or service clubs sometimes offer to provide car pools in communities where this need has been made known.

Usually it is the mother who attends the conference. When mothers are asked to suggest ways of improving conferences they frequently mention the desirability of having the father as well as the mother present. School personnel can encourage both parents to participate in a conference by inviting both and by arranging the conference at a time when both can attend.

The experience of school districts in southern California seems to indicate that all the organizational problems involved in implementing a program of parent-teacher conferences as a means of reporting pupil progress are solvable.

To introduce a program of parent-teacher conferences, with a minimum of friction, it is important that the school administration maintain consistently democratic relations with the faculty and the community. Meeting the needs of both parents and teachers in harmonious ways with the optimum development of children as the goal needs to be worked out. The procedure most likely to achieve this is to bring these groups together in an atmosphere conducive to free discussion. Channels of communication between all persons involved should be maintained and their use encouraged.

Once parent-teacher conferences have become established practice they become an important means of increasing understanding between parents and teachers. Teachers report that conferences benefit them professionally and personally. Talking frequently with parents enables them to broaden their social contacts and to experience a greater sense of belonging to the community. Parents report pleasure in knowing their child's teacher as a person and children feel comfortable when they know their parents and their teacher are friends. If all parties are agreed that conferences are worth while, overcoming the difficulties in organizing them seems worth whatever effort is necessary.

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